

Title of Report: School Readiness

Purpose of the report

1. To provide Members with information regarding current procedures of support in the Early Years Sector.
2. To inform Members about the improvement plan.

Background

3. Schools have expressed concerns that some children arrive to full time education unequipped to access learning.
4. The issues have appeared to increase since the Covid pandemic.
5. Eligibility for a 15 hour 2-year-old place is a family claiming benefits with an income below £15,400. Also, children who are looked after by the local Authority, who have an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order. Children with an Education Health Care Plan or who get Disability Living Allowance are also eligible. The percentage of children accessing the 2-year-old places has increased this term from 77% to 83%. This will support with the early identification of SEND and ensure our most vulnerable children are well supported at this earliest stage.
6. The take up of 3- and 4-year-old places (15 hours universal and 15 hours extended offer for working parents) is 101% due to children out of borough accessing a place in Gateshead. Newly arrived families are supported to access Early years places. Very few children therefore arrive in full time school not having accessed any Early Years Education.
7. All Private, voluntary, and independent settings receive a termly support visit from one of our Early Years Inclusion Consultants. They will support the setting with strategies and how to make reasonable adjustment to meet children's needs as well as advising when and who to refer on to other services. The Consultants are also available to Nursery and Reception classes in schools and childminders.
8. The Early Years Inclusion Consultants have increased the Special Education Needs Coordinators Network meetings to termly and invite in specialist services to preset to upskill the sector. 85% of coordinators have now completed the SENCO Level 3 Award. Training is offered out of core hours to enable all to access. A new SEND transfer document was used between all settings and

schools this year to ensure schools had all the relevant information regarding which additional services were involved with children.

9. The Safeguarding and Compliance Childcare officers visit all settings to support, and this is targeted dependent on Ofsted ratings and need. They offer training which is also out of core hours to meet demand.
10. The Early Years Teaching and Learning Consultants offer a Service level Agreement of support visits, bespoke training and network meetings which include presentations from other services (this month was Early Help and Family Hubs). They lead on the DfE Experts and Mentors programme which has been funded by Covid Recovery; this has offered extensive support to targeted settings.
11. We have a termly review of settings with the Early Years Inclusion Consultants, the Safeguarding and Compliance Childcare Officers, the Teaching and Learning Consultants, Portage service and the SEND Early Years Teachers to enable us to target support and training in a timely manner.
12. We have two childminder weekly groups operating from our Family Hubs. We are trialling a Childminder service level agreement of training and network meetings.
13. We have led on the home learning Environment programme for the Family Hubs. This has included the National Literacy Trust Early Words Together programme and Incredible Years Autism Programme.
14. We have worked with the DfE to run the Early years Professional Development Program, child development training and the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership.

Proposal and/or Issues for consideration

15. Monitor the availability of places as the childcare expansion comes into effect from April 24. This will be specifically focussed on the most vulnerable children as the private sector have indicated that their business model will favour children from working families who may be in a financial position to pay for additional hours. We have mitigated for this in our funding formula.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.

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